

Abstract

Contact has been demonstrated to be the most effective way in reducing stigmatization of individuals with a mental illness. This study has designed a prospective contact condition in which participants were brought into interpersonal contact with 24 mental health consumers during a site visit at a local psychiatric rehabilitation center. This study extensively modified previous designs of contact condition by enhancing the quality of interpersonal contact and adding new elements to augment its effect. During the site visit, the participants engaged in a guided tour around the rehabilitation center to familiarize with various kinds of services in it; in addition, games which aimed at promoting cooperative interaction upon a mutual goal were introduced and a tea reception that resembled an informal chit-chatting social occasion was available for the participants and the mental health consumers. The visit was concluded with a sharing session by two former mental health consumers. Significant attitude change was reported after the contact; compared to control participants, the experimental participants were less socially distant and stigmatizing towards the mental health consumers after the contact took place. The study also examined the role of personalities, previous contact experience and knowledge of mental illness in relation to attitude change and found that social dominance orientation was associated with more stigmatizing attitudes while the rest only exerted a minimal impact on attitude change.